

PERSONALITY

Admired and much awarded

Once on a visit to Doha with her family, Asha Bhosle had food at a Pakistani *dhaba*. Her children flipped for a dish called *kadai ghost* and said, "*Ma tumko hara diya isne* (Mother, somebody beat you in cooking)." The diva of Indian music asked for the cook and the two *kalakars* (artists) met. The cook shared his mouth-watering recipe with the legend. Back home in Mumbai, she bought a huge iron *kadai* and prepared the new recipe much to her children's delight.

"Cooking is an art just like singing," says Asha, 68. "I still have the habit of collecting recipes wherever I go." Her quest for recipes is never-ending, as food affects the voice. "I have never tasted tamarind, curds or anything cold," says Asha, who does *riyaz* for two hours everyday. And the results are there for all to hear.

"Asha-di is an all-rounder. She was a perfect wife, is a dutiful and caring mother and an immensely talented singer," says music director Bappi Lahiri. "She is that kind of a singer who has the ability to produce the best of classical and pop music. Her versatility is incomparable." Asha is working with him in his Hollywood venture *Will to Live* with Sharon Prabhakar.

Asha shows equal expertise in singing folk songs, qawalis, thumris, ghazals and cabaret numbers, and music directors love experimenting with her voice. Her songs have enthralled five generations of music lovers and movie buffs. She richly deserved the Dada Saheb Phalke Award, which was recently conferred on her.

Born in Satara, Maharashtra, in 1933, Asha trained in classical music under her father, Dinanath Mangeskar. Her initial encounter with cinema was as a child actress. But like her sister Lata Mangeskar, she took to playback singing and began her musical career in 1948 with the film *Chunaria*. In those days, however, big films went to singers like Shamshad Begum, Lata Mangeskar or Geeta Dutt, so Asha sang for small



NATIONAL AWARDS

1981 for Umrao Jaan

1986 for Ijaazat

FILMFARE AWARDS

Year	Film	Song
1968	Dus Lakh	'Garibon Ki Suno'
1969	Shikar	'Parde Mein Rehne Do'
1972	Caravan	'Piya Tu Ab To Aaja'
1973	Hare Rama Hare Krishna	'Dum Maro Dum'
1974	Naina	'Hone Lagi Hai Raat'
1975	Pran Jaye Par Vachan Na Jaye	'Chain Se Humko Kahin'
1978	Don	'Ye Mera Dil Pyar Ka Deewana'
1996	Rangeela	'Hoja Rangeela' and 'Tanha Tanha'

SPECIAL AWARDS

1987	Nightingale of Asia
1989	Lata Mangeskar Award by Govt of Madhya Pradesh
1997	Screen Videocon Award for 'Janam Samjha Karo'
1997	MTV Award for 'Janam Samjha Karo'
2000	Omega Award of Excellence for Lifetime Achievement
2001	Dada Saheb Phalke Award

Graphics/Mukesh M

films with no distinction.

Determination saw her climb to stardom. "I could have copied Didi's (Lata's) voice but I preferred not to," says Asha. Her big break came after Lata fell out with music director S.D. Burman, who chose to train Asha for his films. But it was while she was working with music director O.P. Nayyar that Asha's songs fluttered on everybody's lips. That was in the 1960s. Through the decades, she has continued to sing with the same liveliness for actress Karisma Kapoor (*Le gayee le gayee*) as she did for Babita (*Aayo huzoor tumko*). She is as convincing when singing for Urmila Matondkar in *Rangeela* as she was singing for Asha Parekh in *Humsaaya*.

"For her no song is difficult," says music director Jatin. "The ease with which she sings is amazing." She is a music director's delight and the per-

fect voice for beautiful faces.

"You give Asha-ji any song and she is eager to do it," says music director Pyarelal. "She did have to struggle initially, but with immense perseverance and determination she made a name for herself." He found her to be a wonderful person to work with. "During the recording schedules she always kept everyone giggling, never letting one realise the pressures of work," says Pyarelal. "She is an extremely fun-loving and generous person."

Keeping with the recent trends, she has made three remixed albums, *Rahul and I*, *Asha Once More* and the Indi-pop album *Janam Samjha Karo*. Reputed to have sung more than 20,000 songs in 14 languages, Asha has abundantly proved her mastery over a variety of styles.

"I grew up listening to both Asha-ji and Lata-ji. They are simply amazing," says playback singer Udit Narayan, who sang with Asha *Madhuban mein jo Kanaiah* (*Lagaan*) and *Ajnaabi mujko itna bata* (*Pyaar To Hona Hi Tha*).

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Interview/Asha Bhosle

I discovered my real self with Pancham

When the diva of Indian music walked into the drawing room of her Peddar Road residence in Mumbai, we were a little taken aback. The veteran singer, who recently won the Dada Saheb Phalke award, was looking pale. She had returned from Delhi the day before and was battling a bout of viral fever. It did not deter her from giving the promised interview. Excerpts:

To become the legend you are today could not have been easy.

Getting to sing in films was not easy in my young days. HMV was the only music company that existed in those days. Girls were hesitant to approach big music directors. But when the music directors finally came across Asha Bhosle they realised that the young lady had every intention to stay and prove her worth.

Initially, I did not get to sing in the big-budget films, but that did not deter me from reaching my goal. B.R. Chopra's *Naya Daur* was my first big film where I got a chance to sing for the heroine. Many people say it was O.P. Nayyar who gave me the first break but I will not give the credit to anyone. But B.R. Chopra took a big risk by signing me while he was working with established singers like Lata-didi, Geeta Dutt, Shamshad Begum and Suraiya.

How would you describe yourself?

I always wanted to be a good homemaker first, and then a singer. I wouldn't say that I never had any ups and downs in my life, but then I had the patience to bear it all. Today I am successful both in my pro-

fessional life and as a homemaker. I have two able sons and a daughter, who are very happy. Yes, as far as my luck with husband is concerned, I had a tough time. But then you never get everything perfect in life!

How would you describe the role of Rahul Dev Burman in your life?

Pancham was the man in whose presence I discovered my real self. He was a musical genius and I could re-



Rahul & I: Pancham with Asha

late to his outlook. Yes, he is responsible for bringing out the singer Asha Bhosle the world knows today. He was the one who made me realise that I could sing anything from a ghazal to a cabaret to a sad number.

Is today's music and that of yesterday the same?

Music is always rich whether it is of yesteryear or of today. Only the trend changes. Sometimes soft num-

bers become the flavour of the season, sometimes disco beats become the craze. I always keep up with the trends, but not at the cost of degrading the song, the way my song *Yeh waada raha* has been remixed. I am not against remixing, for I have done them myself, but it does not mean that you distort the song.

How do you relax?

I love doing household chores. Cleaning the house takes up most of my time. I often go down to the market to get vegetables and fruits. I do not get to watch television regularly but I do watch movies, especially Jackie Chan's.

How does it feel to have won the Dada Saheb Phalke Award?

It is the greatest honour that any singer can ever get. I am greatly pleased, but I feel that such a recognition has come late in my life. The award has definitely made me proud but it has in no way added any dimension to my life.

Who were the singers you loved working with?

Khan Mastana to Mukesh to Kishore Kumar to Udit Narayan, I have worked with almost all. It really has been a pleasure doing so. But the person I loved working with most was Kishore Kumar. He was from a totally different genre, not only as a person but also as a singer. We always had a healthy competition between us. Kishore-da was so witty that he searched for opportunities to outwit others, whereas, Rafi-saab [Mohammed Rafi] was the sober kind, who always remained engrossed in his work.

DG

Beyond Bollywood, Asha has sung with international pop sensations like Boy George (1992) and Code Red (1998) and is called 'The Grandma Madonna from India' and 'India's Rock-n-Rolling Grandma'.

Last year she got the otherwise conservative Delhi audience wildly dancing at a live concert, *Dus Hazar Ashaon Ke Pal*, along with Urmila

Matondkar. Equally delightful was her performance at the Indica V2 Mega Show when, clad in a dazzling white sari, Asha enchanted Mumbaikars singing *Kambakt ishq* and shaking a leg. In her new role as an Indipop singer, she has gone way ahead of her competitors and walked away with the largest number of awards at the Channel [V] Awards last year.

Long before the government chose her for Dada Saheb Phalke Award Asha had reflected the nation's myriad moods and colours with her ageless songs. "The award was long due for Asha-ji and I am happy that she has at last received this honour," says music director Ravindra Jain. One couldn't agree more.

Debapriya Ghosh